

Into the Wild

by Jon Krakauer

In April 1992, a young man from a well-to-do East Coast family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. Four months later his decomposed body was found by a party of moose hunters in Bus 142.

When most of us teens read books, it is not for fun or recreation. It is to get the “A” in English class. I mean sure, occasionally we pick up the latest gig on the *Diary of the Wimpy Kids* or the Riordan series, but honestly, most authors make their books too long to get their point across.

And that is why I must recommend all teens and adults alike read *Into the Wild*.

Sounds reminiscent of the 19th century manifest destiny nostalgia? The book is all about that...except the nostalgia is within a young man named Chris McCandless on the eve of the 21st century. This guy—McCandless—he is not an ordinary person. But he *was* a person who actually existed and actually did this stuff that has made *Into the Wild* one of the books of best American literature to come out of the modern era.

While most literature that is a reading assignment for school involves deep analysis and hidden messages; this book confronts the reader with issues with candor. McCandless is in the ruthless interior of Alaska and he is starving and dies with his last words: “I have had a happy life and thank the Lord. Goodbye and may God bless all!”

Remember this guy was starving out of his own choice and a self-taken picture of himself shows himself happier at this turn of his life than college graduation, birthday parties, and other “material wastes” that McCandless so ruthlessly hates.

McCandless can be best characterized by saying he is a latter-day follower of Henry David Thoreau. That McCandless believes in the individual

sanctity and moral perfection that all humans decide to corrupt on mere observations as Tolstoy famously argues in his *War and Peace*.

After graduating from Emory University as an extremely accomplished student in 1990, McCandless leveled out of sight. He changed his name, donated \$24,000 of his personal wealth to a hunger charity, abandoned his prized car and all of his possessions, and burned the cash in his wallet. He invented a new life for himself, taking up residence at the ragged margin of our society, wandering across North America in search of raw, transcendent experience. His family had no idea where he was or what had become of him until his remains turned up in Alaska. This is an American who tries to find himself, but gives us all a memento—a question to ask ourselves.

What do you live for and will you die for the sake of achieving that?

McCandless did and today, he is a hero for all literary geeks and people (a lot of people) he touched by his odyssey to freedom. After reading this book, some may feel the urge to just run out of the front door and live “off of the land for a few months”. Things really are prettier in nature, more pristine as McCandless has asserted. But in the end, McCandless’ efforts to escape from human interaction created an irony: he admitted in the end of his days; “Happiness is real when shared.”

Reviewed by Abhishek